

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

CONSERVATION COVER

(Acre)
CODE 327

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources.

PURPOSES

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on land to be retired from agricultural production requiring permanent protective cover, and on other lands needing permanent protective cover. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Species shall be adapted to soil, range site or forest site, and climate conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use plants listed in Table 1 of the NM Specification 327. Native plants will be used if the costs are similar. Use of invasive species shall be avoided.

Seeding rates and methods shall be

specified on the jobsheet and accomplish the planned purpose. **The minimum seeding rate is 20 plants per square foot PLS.**

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting stock shall ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival. Planting dates will be established using the NM Range Planting Standard 550.

Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used. Germination and purity must be accounted for when setting the seeding rates. Known germination and purity percentages will be specified on seedlist sheet of the jobsheet.

Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions. Specify the timing and type of equipment on the jobsheet.

Vegetative manipulation will be accomplished by mechanical, biological or chemical methods, by prescribed burning, or a combination of the four. If burning is used alone or in combination with the other methods, Prescribed Burning, practice code 338, must be included as a planned practice. .

All nutrients shall be applied following the

nutrient management requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). See the NM-Nutrient Management Standard 590 for details.

The established cover will have a minimum stand density of 0.5 plants per square foot.

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

Planting/Establishment

Grasses, forbs, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity. Mixes must include at least one grass, one forb, and one legume.

Where wildlife management is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting will be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure (WEG) to aid in selecting plant species and to provide management requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.

Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.

Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g. mow only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity.

Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's

objectives, the cover should be considered adequate.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. They shall include, but are not limited to, **recommended species, seeding rates and dates, establishment procedures, and other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand**. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation. See the NM-Conservation Cover 327 jobsheet at <http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/NM/js327.xls>

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

- A minimum of 0.5 plants per square foot is required to maintain the cover.
- Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species in each state (March-June). Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community.
- Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds.
- Noxious weeds (including brush and trees) will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.
- Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended.
- To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be

done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

- Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose. Be sure to use Nutrient Management 590 and Pest Management 595 when planning these applications.